# How to Hire a Web Developer (Complete Guide for Smart Business Owners)

Let me be upfront with you — hiring a web developer is one of the most important decisions you'll make for your business online.

When I talk to business owners who've been through a bad hiring experience, they all say the same thing: "I wish I had known this earlier." One client of mine lost almost $4,000 and four months to a developer who disappeared after taking half the payment. No website. No refund. No reply.

That's the real cost of not knowing how to hire a web developer the right way.

Hiring the wrong developer can cost you months and thousands of dollars — and set your entire business back. But the good news? With the right steps, you can avoid all of that.

In this guide, I'm going to walk you through everything — from spotting red flags to asking the right questions, understanding fair pricing, and finally finding someone who actually delivers. Whether you're building your first website or redesigning an existing one, this guide has your back.

## Why Hiring the Wrong Web Developer Can Ruin Your Business

> *A bad web developer doesn't just waste your money — they waste your time, hurt your brand, and can even damage your SEO. Knowing the warning signs early saves you from serious damage later.*

I've seen this story play out dozens of times. A business owner finds someone cheap on a freelance platform. The price looks amazing. They pay upfront. And then the problems start.

Deadlines get missed. Messages go unanswered. The website that eventually gets delivered looks like it was built in 2005. And when you ask about SEO or mobile performance? Blank stares.

Here's what bad developer experiences actually look like in real life:

- Missed deadlines that push back your product launch by weeks or months

- Poor communication — you send 5 messages and get one vague reply
- A website that looks outdated or doesn't convert visitors into customers
- Zero SEO work done, so Google can't even find your site
- No post-launch support — once they're paid, they vanish

If any of this sounds familiar, you're not alone. This is exactly why learning how to hire a web developer properly — before you hand over a single dollar — is so important.

A professional website isn't just a digital brochure. It's your business working for you 24/7. And if it's built badly, it costs you more than just money. Check out why a strong online presence matters for your business.

💡 Pro Tip: Cheap developers often cost more in the long run. A $300 website that needs to be completely rebuilt at $2,000 isn't a bargain — it's a trap. Always think about total cost, not just upfront price.

### Why Does a Bad Developer Hurt My Business?

A bad developer can deliver a slow, broken, or insecure website. This drives away customers and tanks your search rankings.

### Can I Fix a Website Built by a Bad Developer?

Sometimes yes, but often it's cheaper to rebuild from scratch. Always get a second opinion from a trusted developer before paying for repairs.

### How Common Are Bad Web Developer Experiences?

Very common, unfortunately. Many business owners rush the hiring process. With the right vetting steps though, you can avoid 90% of these problems.

## Step 1 – Be Clear About What You Actually Need

*Before reaching out to any developer, get crystal clear on your business goals, what type of website you need, your budget, and your timeline. This saves you from confusion and wasted conversations.*

Here's something most people skip — and it's the biggest mistake. They approach a developer without knowing exactly what they want. Then they get confused by pricing, frustrated by timelines, and end up with the wrong product.

Before you talk to anyone, answer these questions for yourself:

- What's the main goal of your website? Selling products? Generating leads? Building your brand?
- Is it an informational website, an eCommerce store, or a booking platform?
- What's your realistic budget range?
- When do you actually need the website live?
- Do you have content (text, images) ready or do you need help with that too?

When you have answers to these, every developer conversation becomes 10x easier. You're not guessing. You're telling them exactly what you need.

Understanding what skills should a web developer have also starts here. Once you know your goals, you know what kind of developer can actually meet them. A simple branding site needs a different skill set than a full-blown eCommerce store.

Not sure what type of site is right for your business? Read this breakdown of custom websites vs CMS-based websites to help you decide.

💡 Pro Tip: Write your requirements down before contacting any developer. Even a simple one-page document with your goals, budget, and timeline will make you look prepared — and help you get more accurate quotes.

## What If I Don't Know My Budget Yet?

Start with a ballpark. Even saying "I want to spend between $1,000 and $3,000" gives a developer enough to work with. You can always refine it later.

## Do I Need to Know Tech to Hire a Developer?

Not at all. You just need to know what you want your website to do. Leave the technical decisions to the developer.

## What If My Needs Change Mid-Project?

This is very common. That's why a good developer will have a clear change request process in your contract. Always ask about this upfront.

# Step 2 – What to Ask a Web Developer Before Hiring

*Asking the right questions before hiring a web developer separates professionals from amateurs. Cover their experience, portfolio, tech stack, SEO knowledge, and support process before signing anything.*

I always tell business owners: treat this like a job interview. Because it is. You're not just buying a service — you're trusting someone with your online presence.

Here's a checklist of what to ask every developer you consider:

## Experience & Portfolio

- How long have you been building websites?
- Can I see 3-5 examples of your recent work?
- Have you worked with businesses in my industry before?

## Technical Skills

- What platform or tech stack do you use and why?
- How do you handle mobile responsiveness?
- What do you do to make websites load fast?
- How do you approach website security?

## SEO & Business Understanding

- Do you set up basic SEO during development?
- Will the site be optimized for Google Search?
- Do you know how website structure affects rankings?

## Support & Maintenance

- What happens after the website goes live?
- Do you offer ongoing maintenance?

- How do I reach you if something breaks?

A developer who can't answer these questions clearly is a red flag. A good developer will walk you through their process with confidence.

When you're evaluating answers, remember that knowing how to hire a web developer also means knowing how to read between the lines. Vague answers and overpromising are warning signs.

Want to understand what goes into building and maintaining a professional site? Check out this guide on website maintenance costs to know what to expect long-term.

💡 Pro Tip: Always ask to speak with one or two past clients as references. A confident, honest developer will have no problem connecting you with happy customers.

### Should I Ask for a Test Project Before Hiring?

For smaller projects, yes. A paid test task is totally reasonable. It shows how the developer works and communicates.

### What If a Developer Has No Portfolio?

This isn't always a dealbreaker if they're just starting out. But ask for practice projects or mockups to see their skill level.

### Is Tech Stack Really That Important?

Yes. The platform your site is built on affects speed, security, and how easy it is to update. Always ask and understand the reasoning behind their choice.

## Step 3 – Red Flags When Hiring a Web Developer

*Red flags when hiring a web developer include no contract, suspiciously low pricing, poor communication, and zero questions about your business. Spot these early and save yourself a disaster.*

I want to be real with you here — some developers are just not ready to take your money. And the scary part is, they often sound great at first.

Here are the red flags when hiring a web developer that you absolutely cannot ignore:

- No contract offered — a serious developer always works with a written agreement
- Unrealistically cheap pricing — if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is
- No clear process — they can't explain how they work or what happens step by step
- Poor communication even before you hire them — imagine how it gets after you pay
- They never ask about your business — how can they build for your goals if they don't understand them?
- No post-launch support offered — your relationship ends the second they deliver

Silence after payment is a nightmare. I've heard horror stories where clients sent deposits and then waited two months without a single update. That's not a developer — that's a ghost.

Knowing how to hire a web developer also means knowing when to walk away. If you notice even two or three of these red flags, trust your gut. Keep looking.

If you're dealing with a WordPress site, also watch for developers who can't troubleshoot basic problems. See common WordPress issues and how to fix them — a good developer should know these cold.

### What Should a Contract Include?

At minimum: project scope, timeline, payment terms, revision limits, and ownership of the finished product. Never start work without one.

### Is Cheap Always Bad?

Not always — but extremely low pricing usually signals inexperience, cutting corners, or overseas cheap work that may not meet your standards. Value matters more than price.

### What If a Developer Gets Defensive About These Questions?

That's a red flag in itself. A professional welcomes your questions and sees them as part of building trust, not an attack on their credibility.

## Step 4 – Understanding Cost Without Getting Scammed

*Web development pricing varies widely based on complexity, platform, and experience. Understanding what drives cost helps you spot fair deals and avoid being overcharged or underserved.*

Let's talk money — because this is where most people either overpay or get burned.

Web development pricing is not one-size-fits-all. A simple landing page is very different from a full eCommerce store. Here's what affects cost:

- Type of website — informational, eCommerce, booking, membership
- Design complexity — template-based vs fully custom
- Number of pages and features
- Platform choice — WordPress, Shopify, custom code
- Developer experience and location
- Ongoing support and maintenance requirements

Here's the truth: cheap is not the same as affordable. A $400 website that doesn't rank on Google, loads slowly, and crashes every month is far more expensive than a $2,000 site that works perfectly and brings you leads.

For a full breakdown of pricing by website type and complexity, read our complete guide: How much does a professional website cost? It covers everything in detail.

💡 Pro Tip: Never choose a developer based on the lowest price alone. Compare the value they offer — portfolio quality, communication, support, and process. That's what determines real return on investment.

## What's a Reasonable Price for a Business Website?

A professional small business website typically ranges from $1,500 to $5,000+. Custom eCommerce sites can go much higher depending on features.

## Should I Pay 100% Upfront?

No. A standard arrangement is 30-50% upfront, with the remainder due at project milestones or completion. Never pay 100% before work begins.

### Are Monthly Maintenance Fees Normal?

Yes. Hosting, updates, backups, and security monitoring are ongoing needs. A legitimate developer will explain what's included in maintenance costs.

## Step 5 – Check Technical & Business Skills

> *A skilled web developer needs more than coding ability. They should understand UX design, SEO basics, mobile responsiveness, site speed, security, and how to communicate clearly with non-technical clients.*

Coding is only part of the equation. A great developer understands your business and translates it into a website that actually works for your goals.

So what skills should a web developer have? Here's what really matters:

- UX understanding — can they think like your customers?
- Mobile responsiveness — over 60% of web traffic is mobile (source: Statista)
- SEO basics — proper heading structure, fast loading, clean code
- Website speed — images, caching, hosting choices all matter
- Security — SSL, backups, secure login practices
- CMS knowledge — WordPress, Shopify, or whatever platform is right for you
- Clear communication — can they explain technical things in plain language?

Don't be afraid to test these skills during your conversations. Ask them how they would make your site faster or how they'd set up your site for SEO. Their answers reveal a lot about their real-world experience.

Understanding how website structure affects SEO is one of those things a truly skilled developer should know by heart. If they don't, that's a gap worth noting.

### Does My Developer Need to Know SEO?

They don't need to be an SEO expert, but they should build a site that's SEO-ready — proper tags, fast speed, mobile-friendly, and clean structure.

### Is Design Skill Important in a Developer?

It depends. Some developers are pure coders. If design matters to you, look for a developer who works with a designer or has a strong design portfolio.

### Should My Developer Know Multiple Platforms?

It's a plus, but depth beats breadth. A developer who knows WordPress very well is more valuable than one who knows five platforms poorly.

## Step 6 – Freelance vs Agency: What's Better for You?

> *Choosing between a freelancer and an agency depends on your budget, project size, and how much ongoing support you need. Both have real advantages — the right choice depends on your situation.*

This is one of the most common questions I get: "Should I hire a freelancer or go with an agency?" The answer really depends on where you are in your business.

| | Freelancer | Agency |
|---|---|---|
| Cost | Lower upfront | Higher but structured |
| Communication | Direct 1-on-1 | Team-managed |
| Speed | Faster for small projects | Better for large builds |
| Support | Depends on person | Dedicated team |
| Best For | Small sites, tight budget | Complex projects, growth |

For a small business just getting started with a straightforward website, a trusted freelancer can be a great choice — more personal, often faster, and easier on the budget.

But if you're growing fast, need multiple types of expertise, and want a long-term partnership with reliable support, an agency gives you a whole team working together on your project.

The key to knowing how to hire a web developer — whether solo or as part of a team — is making sure they align with your goals, your communication style, and your budget.

If you're not sure which direction suits your business, see our services page at [codfellow.com/services](codfellow.com/services) to understand how we approach different types of projects.